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Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics

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THE EXTENSION AGENT'S POSITION IN THE NEWER PROGRAMS¹

By

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The topic assigned me may well be discussed from the following angles:

1. Must not extension work assume a larger leadership in agricultural affairs?
2. The programs of the Administration strike at huge problems - aim for new and larger policies for agriculture in a period of great readjustments.
3. Needed newer programs in extension generally must be based on larger problems, give less emphasis to highly specialized projects.
4. Extension teaching needs to be developed on the basis of the laws of learning and a few great principles of education.

What the world is now going through may sometime be looked upon as a great period of reformation. Our concern is to know the situations better and to redirect our effort to help people meet their problems of readjustment. We must cultivate more knowledge of the problems of the masses, find solutions, and learn how to move people to change, to readjust. We have done yeoman service in helping rural people with their production and homemaking problems. Now we must work more intensively to help to build up agriculture and country life generally. Secretary Wallace has said that the colleges and the extension service have worked with perhaps the upper third of farmers, that these could adopt the recommended practices and that they have profited with them. Can we change? Can we relegate to the background some of the projects which have long marked our programs? Will college, department, and extension work more with local people in analyzing new and ever-changing situations, economic and social, and arrive at new programs which strike at the real needs of the mass of the people? Or shall we stick largely to programs of highly specialized production subject matter? I think the time has come when extension - college - station should and will shift the emphasis from this type of service to uniting on larger and more vital problems and lead in larger agricultural affairs in building a better agriculture for the majority.

I like immensely what you have been doing in carrying forward the national conservation program. I think Mr. Gardner and the county agricultural agents have done a beautiful job in this. But isn't our greater responsibility to this and all the newer agricultural programs of the Administration, for all of us - club agents, specialists, home demonstration agents, and local leaders - to lead aggressively in county and State to make those programs ours. We cannot stand

1.-Given at Annual Conference of Extension workers, Orono, Maine, February 3, 1937.

off and "knock, knock" and wait for the day when we can make our old programs dominant. We have no vested right. The county extension organization no longer is the only agency through which the Government may work in carrying forward agricultural programs. Extension work as a dynamic force in the country will survive only as it leads. And lead we must if we are to be of greatest service to rural people. We must lead in studying the more basic problems of rural welfare; lead people to understand these problems; lead them to move to make needed readjustments. And here the newer programs offer wonderful opportunities to advance faster and farther some of the things we have advocated for many a year - soil building, soil saving, better pastures and feed crops, home canning, better living from the farm and what not. Cannot we work with every agency interested in agricultural improvement, and mesh our programs with theirs?

May I quote here from a statement made by one of the great men in extension, a man who has passed to the beyond, Dr. A. C. True, who said nearly 20 years ago:

"In these (war) times national aims and requirements are necessarily more prominent. The Nation, States, and local communities are brought close together in many ways. Old relationships are strengthened and assume new phases. The effect of these things will undoubtedly remain. It is therefore the more important that with broad sympathy and understanding our co-operation shall rest on a firm basis of mutuality of purpose, desire, and object.

"Thus in harmony with the spirit of our day we shall make a contribution toward the establishment of a broader democracy in which the best aspirations of the masses of the people shall be worked out in practical life with the aid of intelligent, well-trained and unselfish leaders, who are clearly recognized to be in closest touch and sympathy with the people in whose interests they are working."

In a word, the extension agent's position in the rural programs of national origin is this - he is leader in county or State in agricultural affairs. As such a leader, he will be broad enough in his sympathies and knowledge to understand the situations and aims back of these national programs and help in every way to advance them through education, through the training of local leaders, and even in the administration of the various projects.

We in extension are concerned too with another type of newer program. There are some in extension who with the letting up of the emergency clamored to get back to their old projects. I do not think we ought to go back or that we will go back. By changing our attack, our method, our programs with changing conditions and changing needs extension will persist as a leading force in agricultural affairs. We can learn the problem approach in place of the project approach of the past. By adopting larger aims to guide us, we can find these larger problems, search for new data, and agree upon newer and larger remedies.

To be concrete, I think one of the greatest problems before us is that of low farm incomes. Our approach to this in the past has been largely through teachings which improve the production of crops and animals, and to some extent through encouraging means of better marketing. The more fundamental approach would be that of studying this problem of low farm incomes from an economic farm organization and management standpoint, and then arriving at a program which would help rural people to increase their incomes through better farm

organization and management practices. This in some measure you are doing through your "increase your income with poultry" project. This Connecticut is attempting to do with a poultry program in which three of the elements strike at meeting production problems, but the remaining three strike at farm organization and business problems. With this problem of better incomes are tied up questions of efficient land use and market opportunities. All call for the coordinated effort of four or five specialists in analyzing, diagnosing the underlying situations, agreeing upon solutions, and then concentrating upon carrying out the program. The day is passing when each extension specialist will be allowed to develop independently of other specialists, six or seven highly specialized and technical projects. To lead, we need to learn how to reach down below the top one-third- to reach the great middle mass of farmers. Their greatest problem and our greatest aim should be that of raising their incomes. Great readjustments are involved, but I have faith in the leadership of the extension service to teach its own specialists and agents to see these opportunities and to coordinate their effort in advancing a program to meet these larger needs.

Similarly, among our greater problems is that of health - health of our rural people. This health problem should be studied in terms of the actual situations which prevail, community by community. The solutions may best be found by studying these data with several specialists and the nurses, doctors, school and health officials. Then together these people may arrive at a program to meet actual health needs. Thus we have in addition to the great problem of building more healthful bodies in our young, that of relieving some of the health conditions which commence to plague the middle aged and the old. If Dr. Sherman is right in his idea that we can add 7 years to the life of an individual by means of a rational diet, that increasingly must be taught. But we have other problems in every community of actual health situations that are serious and severe. "In many areas, water and milk supplies are not yet adequately safeguarded. Sewage disposal is dangerously primitive. Streams are polluted. The spread of communicable disease is not controlled, and health education is sadly neglected." "Protection of mothers in childbirth is a fundamental child-welfare measure. Adequate maternal care often decides whether the baby survives the first month of life, and the loss of the mother in most cases is irreplaceable. Our maternal death rate is 62 deaths per 10,000 live births, as against 25 in Japan, 27 in Norway, 27 in Sweden. The infant death rate was 58 in 1933. Available information shows the following countries had lower rates - Australia 40, New Zealand 31, Netherlands 44, Switzerland 38. County after county have no adequate hospital or medical facilities."^{2/} We are told also that 50 percent of patients in our hospitals are suffering from mental rather than physical ill health.

You will not misunderstand what I have been trying to say. I am not belittling some of the wonderful work that has been done through the nutrition, child-welfare, and clothing work. But I think the problem is greater than this or that project. How can we influence the club people, the home demonstration people, the specialists involved, the doctors, the nurses, the school people,

2.- Toward Security in Health. Abbott, Grace. Survey, v.71, pp. 42-3.
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to face conditions in the county, study actual health situations and the causes that are responsible for these situations; to work out a program in which each of these specialists may have a part; a newer program directed more specifically to meet the larger problems?

Another large problem is that of the part-time farmer. Here in Maine there are 19,602 farmers who reported in 1935 that they worked off the farm for pay or income during part of the year. This is 46.8 percent of the farmers of the State. Such farmers worked an average of 117 days away from the farm. Now the question is, What kind of program do we have for the part-time farmer? Our technical agricultural programs help him little. We may need to show him how to increase his income. We need to do far more in building for better health situations, but above all, I think, we need to have a program for these and for other farmers that will help them to make a better living from the farm. More vegetables, more fruits, more eggs, more milk for health and for better living. More reading, better homes, better family life must also be considered. Club work, which is now reaching more part-time farmers than adult extension is reaching, still has the problem of meeting the needs of older boys and girls. Some of these are too poorly prepared educationally. Some must receive assistance in evaluating their desires, inventorying their capacities, analyzing the opportunities which exist. They need help too in preparing for this or that occupation. This, I think, is one of the greatest things we can do for the older boy and girl.

Nor is this problem of the part-time farmer new. Much of the farming of New England has always been part-time farming, as factory and town called the farmer with the lure of real wages. Let me read from the Old Farmer's Almanac, 1837, just 100 years ago:

"Why thus alone at your ploughing, Mr. Thrifty? 'O, sir, my boys have all left me and turned shoe-peggers. I was in hopes to keep at least one of them to help carry on the farm; but they have all five gone into the leather line - Bill, Jo, Nathan, Tom and Jonas. And then there was old Patrick M'Coulter, he had lived with us for years, you know; I never thought of losing him. He was one of the best at the plough; he could swing a scythe as easy as my lady waves her fan in dog days; and then, with a cradle in the grain field, there was no one up to him; it was mere walking, walking sir, for amusement! But Pat, too, a foolish booby, has turned cobler! If this is the way things are going on, our farms must soon run up to bushes. There is scarcely any help to be found hereabout, unless we pay treble the amount of former times. I expect that, ere long, lawyer, doctor and parson will awl, at last, as the saying is, become knights of the brogue; for, you see, the making of a pair of nigger shoes brings twenty-five cents, and twelve pairs a day is no great affair. So, sir, money, much money, comes of shoe pegging. Yankees love money, and will leave farm and all to obtain it."

Our newer programs should strike also, more aggressively, at the general problem of how we may reach more farmers and farm women. We cannot hold here to the idea that everyone is offered opportunity to attend our meetings and demonstrations, and therefore if people do not take advantage of these oppor-

tunities, that is their concern. Nor can we expect to reach more of the stay-at-homes or those who seemingly are not attracted by this or that project by merely improving our so-called extension methods. It is going to take more than a fancy circular letter or a dressed-up project group meeting to reach these people. We shall have to dig deeper. Our biggest concern here is to find out what the problems are that affect these persons not now reached through extension. This will require us to go out of the byways - onto the farms and into the homes of the stay-at-homes. We need to do a lot of local exploring and fact surveying. Meanwhile, some of the old projects might well be put in the attic with the 1922 hats, old magazines, dress forms, and dusty bric-a-brac of a bygone age. For as it is now, some of our projects do seem uneconomical and impractical for the great mass of farm people. Unless the teaching meets a real problem - one felt by those to be taught, the teaching cannot go far. To improve our teaching then, we must first improve our method of finding the real needs and problems of the many.

All this obligates the extension agent to know the laws of learning and principles of education, and to apply these increasingly in his planning. We tend to short cut, yet successful extension work today as never before is dependent upon well-drawn plans of work.

So many agencies are seeking the extension agent's help in trying to reach rural people, and so many demands are made on his time, that he makes little progress with his extension program unless he plans his activities and schedules his time. Indeed in county after county, extension programs have broken down, and little organized systematic work is being done in attaining the project objectives.

Perhaps we depend too much upon our so-called projects. These fail to give needed details of procedure. Often they are trade marked with the same subject matter and the same devices and all too sketchy procedures, State by State. Technically speaking, a project is really a broad formal statement of objectives, relationships, and method for a particular subject-matter field, as dairy husbandry, nutrition, fruit growing, and so on. This doesn't help the county agent much - or the specialist. It is only as we work down to specific situations and procedures in each such field and lay down detailed outlined procedures and responsibilities that we really get down to earth. And that has to be done for each county as well as for the State. Moreover, each one must build a plan, adapt subject matter and procedure to his own situations, resources, and capabilities. You do not plan when you merely accept the other fellow's outline.

Nor can the extension specialist fail herein. He must think out and plan procedures for the State as well as know his subject matter. Really, he should not separate subject matter and method. He must think of the two together, and plan the two for differing situations. Nor can he pass to others the designing, making, and use for the State, of needed teaching aids. He must have ideas on effective circulars, circular letters, film strips, and other illustrative material, news information, discussion outlines, and other tools. He must work some of these out, make them available for use to county agents. If he specializes only in the subject matter of his field, his usefulness in extension work is very limited.

May I in closing tell you that it is always a privilege to come to Maine and discuss extension work. You always give me something to take with me, to help me in planning work elsewhere. I have no fear but that you will accept the newer challenges of the newer programs and earn an even larger place in leading in agricultural affairs here, in building and rebuilding a better, more healthful, and more profitable country life. You will adjust programs, projects, and plans to the real and larger needs. Coordinate your work and that of national and State agencies. You will jump in and lead and blaze new trails, new policies, new methods.

Let me now express this final injunction. Take care of your health. The advice is trite, I know. But unless you organize your work, your teachings, your schedules, you cannot lead; you cannot serve most effectively, and your health may break. Take care of yourselves. Take your vacations. Cultivate hobbies and leisure-time activities. Protect your health, physical and mental. Don't allow yourself to grow stale. You cannot lead if you are dead tired, half sick all the time. Make new contacts. Get out on the back roads. Find problems new to you out perhaps old to the many. Read more about what's happening to this old world of ours. See more of what's happening to the littler world, your own county. Learn to work also without depending entirely upon meetings, meetings, meetings.

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